

# PARKINSON DISEASE DEMENTIA

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Dementia is a broad term used to categorize the gradual loss of cognitive functioning, which makes it difficult for people to think, reason and remember. These areas of cognition are impaired to such a degree that it interferes with an individual's ability to complete daily tasks and activities. Around 70% of people with Parkinson's will experience Parkinson Disease Dementia (PDD) at some point in their lives and are most likely to develop it 10 or more years after the initial Parkinson's diagnosis. Parkinson Disease dementia has a variety of symptoms and may present differently from person to person. This article will briefly discuss how Parkinson Disease dementia is diagnosed, how it is different from other dementias, and the most common symptoms.

## **How is Parkinson Disease dementia diagnosed?**

Parkinson Disease dementia is diagnosed when someone who has been living with Parkinson's motor symptoms (tremor, rigidity, slowness of movement, and/or balance difficulties) for more than one year begins to experience cognitive impairment which significantly impairs their daily life. This includes social, occupational, and personal care difficulties which are not caused by existing motor or non-motor Parkinson's symptoms.

If you are experiencing difficulties with day-to-day tasks, not related to other motor or non-motor symptoms, your neurologist may perform some tests to assess your thinking, memory, and concentration. They may also conduct a medication review, and order blood work to rule out any other causes.

Once a diagnosis of Parkinson Disease dementia has been made it is important to work with your neurologist or specialist to explore treatment options. There is no "one-size fits all" approach to treating PDD, and the approach that your healthcare team takes will depend on the symptoms you are experiencing and their severity. Unfortunately, much like Parkinson's, there are no medications which slow the progression of Parkinson Disease dementia.

## **How is it different from Alzheimer's or Dementia with Lewy Bodies?**

Alzheimer's and Dementia with Lewy Bodies are other forms of dementia which share some similarities with PDD, but also have distinct differences. Simply put, Alzheimer's tends to affect people's memory and language abilities, whereas PDD tends to affect people's attention, memory, executive function, and visuospatial function. Dementia with Lewy Bodies is similar to Parkinson disease and PDD as it also impacts cognition, movement, sleep, mood, and can cause hallucinations or delusions. In Dementia with Lewy Bodies the major difference is timing of onset. Parkinson Disease dementia must be diagnosed at least one year after receiving a Parkinson's diagnosis, while Dementia with Lewy Bodies is present at diagnosis or within the first year of diagnosis.

## **Symptoms**

**Symptoms of Parkinson Disease Dementia include cognitive impairment, Parkinson's psychosis, disorientation, confusion, and mood swings.**

**Regarding mood swings, a person may become impatient or aggressive, even if they weren't an angry or irritable person previously.**

**Regarding cognitive impairment, people with Parkinson Disease dementia experience changes to their cognition which make day to day tasks difficult or impossible to complete. Deficits to cognition usually impact attention, memory, visuospatial function (ability to understand visual information), and executive function (ability to reason and make decisions). For more on cognitive impairment**